1.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF Present Use:

Wherein is shewn

That the Strong ought to Bear with the Weak, and the Weak not Clamour against or Censure the Strong:

IN WHICH

The true Notion of the Strong and Weak is Stated.

Delivered in a Farewell-Sermon at St. *George Buttolph-Lane, London.*

By *Benjamin Hoffman*, Master of Arts, of *Baliol* College, *Oxford*, and late Lecturer there.

Rom. 15. 1. *We therefore that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.*

Rom. 16. 17, 18. *Now I beseech you Brethren mark them which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them: For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

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TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

DANIEL

EARL OF

NOTTINGHAM,

BARON of *DAVENTRY*,

And one of the Lords of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy-Council.

My Lord,

HOW great a Stranger soever I may be to Your Lordship, I am not much

at

at a loſs for an Apologie for the Boldneſs of devoting this mean Preſent to Your Honourable Name. The inexpreſſible Favours I had the Honour to receive from Your Noble Father, have juſtly entitled Your Lordſhip to the beſt of my Performances: 'Twas His generous Charity made me what I am; and what the Product of that may be, is and ſhall be a due Tribute to Your Lordſhip. His Vertues Your Lordſhip inherits; and nothing can more fully compleat the utmoſt Aim of my Ambition, than an Opportunity of ſhewing my ſelf Grateful to Your Lord-

ſhips Father's Immortal Memory, and of manifeſting my ſelf (in what Circumſtance ſoever)

My Lord,

Your Lordſhips

Moſt Obedient Servant,

B. Hoffman.

To

To

To the Parishioners of St. *George Buttolph-Lane*, and St. *Buttolph's Billingsgate.*

Gentlemen,

IT *is not unknown to most Persons that have known me, what Relation for several years last past I have stood in to you, and since we liv'd so friendly and kindly together for so long a time, I was resolv'd to do all in me lay, to part as fairly at the last, and to leave some certain Testimony of my Respect behind me: And since it is at this time the Indeavour of divers* Learned *Men in the Church, to Sweeten and Reconcile Mens Minds to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of* England, *that so the Civil Power may not surprize them, without due warning, and weighty Reasons given, why they ought now especially to indeavour*

an Union: Since ſeveral others are upon this Charitable, and Seaſonable Deſign, I thought my Words might come among you with more Eſteem and Reception than a meer Stranger's: And though I every way fall ſhort of the worth of thoſe other Perſons, that have bended their Purpoſes this way, yet when I conſider the Kindneſſes I have receiv'd from moſt of you, in all other Caſes, I cannot in the leaſt imagine I ſhall be diſappointed in my Expectations, now, in this laſt piece of Reſpect I am ſhewing to you; and if it doth (in the peruſal) any Perſon Service, I ſhall heartily thank God, and really Rejoice in my Brothers return.

I am Your Faithful Servant,

Benjamin Hoffman.

Rom. XV. 5, 6, 7.

Now the God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus,
That you may with one mind and one mouth glorifie God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

BEfore I proceed to the distinct speaking to the Words of my Text, it is necessary that I first lead you to the Consideration of the Apostle's Method and Design in two or three of the foregoing Chapters.

Now the sum of that which the Apostle is arguing, is laid down in the 13*th* Chapter of

this Epiſtle: In the whole he is managing the Jewiſh and the Chriſtian Profeſſors, and ſuch as were partly of one, and partly of the other Perſwaſion, with all the caution and warineſs that can be poſſibly, that he may give none offence to either: And in order to this he lays down Rules that ought to be univerſally received by Men of all Pretenſions. And theſe he begins with in the 13*th* Chapter and firſt Verſe, *Let every ſoul*, ſaith he, *be ſubject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God*; therefore let your leſſer Diſputes be of what nature they will, if you believe a God, you muſt be Obedient, *for the powers that be are ordained of God*; as if he had ſaid, Nothing in Chriſtianity ought to be pretended, or made uſe of, to give any man Immunity from Obedience; for this from all Subjects, of what Quality ſoever, is due to thoſe to whom Allegiance belongs. And this Doctrine he preſt in oppoſition to ſome that St. *Peter* and St. *Jude* reprehended, *viz. Such as deſpiſe Government, and are ſelf-willed and preſumptuous, and that are not afraid to ſpeak evil of Dignities*, 2 *Pet.* 2. 10. And this Obedience he preſſes *v.* 5. that it muſt be *from the heart*: It's poſſible a cunning Rebel, or proſperous Offender,

der, may avoid Wrath and Punishment, and therefore his Obedience must not be for fear of Wrath only, *i. e.* not only so far as will keep him from a Fine, a Prison, or a Gallows; but it must be *from his Conscience*, *i. e.* in Obedience to the Constitution of God, whose Officer he is: For every Supreme Magistrate, Legally placed in any Kingdom, hath, and must be thought to have, Commission from God, tho' he be an Heathen.

And after the Apostle had managed this Argument throughly, how Christians should carry themselves towards their Governours, he then descends to tell us how they should carry themselves one towards another; and for this he lays down Love and Charity, and Bearing one with another, as the Foundation and Ground-work of all good Christian Conversation; and here at the time of writing this Epistle he found great Divisions and Dissentions already crept into the Church of Jewish Believers, not only against the Gentiles, but likewise among themselves, some *Converts* clearly discerning that they had a freedom from the Judaical Yoke, and others conceiving themselves still to be under that Dispensation; and hence came

came the Quarrel, *viz.* That thoſe that were zealous for the Moſaical Law, condemned and were angry at all others, as Breakers of God's Law, that did not obſerve them as they did; and on the other hand, they that were inſtructed in the Knowledge of their *Chriſtian Liberty*, were reſolved to maintain that Liberty which was purchaſed by Chriſt, and were apt to deſpiſe and contemn thoſe that ſtill continued ſcrupulous in the aboliſht Judaical Rites, and ſo between the one and the other, the Chriſtian Communion was likely to be broken, and an inveterate Separation to be made among them; and to both of theſe St. *Paul* applies himſelf, Thoſe of you that do not think your ſelves bound to obſerve thoſe Laws, you that underſtand better, do not you reject the ſcrupulous or erroneous Judaizer, but receive him to your Communion; *Him that is weak in the Faith receive ye*, but yet ſo receive him, as that he may not thereby be encouraged to take too much upon him; *receive him, but not to doubtful diſputations*; as if he had ſaid, If he be weak and erroneous in himſelf, let him not be cenſorious and troubleſome to others; do not you deſpiſe and reject him, neither perſwade I that he ſhould moleſt you;

ſo

ſo that this Chapter was writ, and this Advice here given, that the ſtrong might be gentle and courteous towards the weak, and not the weak from hence be clamorous againſt the ſtrong, as ſome (eſpecially in theſe days) make this and ſuch like advice in Holy Writ, to be as it were a Shelter and a Sanctuary for them to do and ſay what they pleaſe, under the pretence of Weakneſs, and that prudent and legal Reſtraints muſt not be talkt of, without grieving or judging our Brother. But there is a great deal of difference between mildly and wiſely indeavouring to reduce men to *Catholick Communion*, and between offering any Offence, or Deſpiſing them, as I ſhall ſhew farther anon; and St. *Paul* plainly doth it in the following Chapter; for if, ſaith he, after ſo much Charity and Tenderneſs and Good-will that the ſtrong bear towards the weak, they do not hearken, then the Offence lies on their ſide, and at their doors and Conſciences, *Rom.* 16. 17, 18. *Now I beſeech you Brethren mark them which cauſe diviſions and offences*, and if after all the friendly Offers you make to Communion, they will not comply, *avoid them, for they which are ſuch ſerve not our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but their own belly and intereſt, and by*

good words and fair ſpeeches deceive the hearts of the ſimple. And thus for the introducing my enſuing Diſcourſe, I have ſhewed you the Deſign of the Apoſtle; which is as I ſhew'd you,

1. To lay down hearty Obedience to Magiſtrates, as the indiſpenſible Duty of all Chriſtians, and Men that own a God.

2. To have Chriſtians friendly towards each other, the ſtrong not to Deſpiſe or Scorn the weak, and the weak not to Clamour at and Cenſure the ſtrong; that the ſtrong ſhould more value his Brother's Soul, than a needleſs humouring and pleaſing himſelf, *ch.* 15. *v.* 1. and that the weak ſhould not be Loud and Poſitive in Diſputations that he doth not underſtand: And that all in their ſeveral places may do this, he propoſeth both the Fountain and Example of all Heavenly and Chriſtian Graces, *Now the God of patience and conſolation grant you to be like minded one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus, wherefore receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received us, to the glory of God.*

Upon theſe Words I ſhall briefly and plainly diſcourſe upon theſe following things.

1. Give a ſhort and eaſie Explication of the Words of the Text.

2. In

2. In some few Words touch upon the Duty of Obedience to Magistrates.

3. I shall principally endeavour to shew you how we ought to carry our selves towards each other with reference to Communion, the Strong to the Weak, and the Weak to the Strong; which may serve as a Method or Incitement to us to be *like-minded one towards another*, that we may *with one mind and one mouth glorifie God*, and *receive one another as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*

4. Conclude with some Practical Reflexions upon the Whole.

As for the Text, the Apostle is here wishing a very great Blessing upon the Infant Christian-Church; and he founds the Rise of all Blessings in God: And so the meaning of the Words is this; Now (saith he) I have laid down as amply and as plainly as I can the Duty of Christians one towards another, I beseech God, who is the Fountain of Patience and Consolation, *the God of Patience and Consolation, i. e.* the God from whom all Patience and Consolation comes, *make you to be like minded one towards another, i. e.* cause that you may all think and own the very self-same thing, lest through diversity of

Opinions, there ariſe Diſcords, Hatreds, Separations, Offences, and Scandals, to the great damage of the Church and Glory of God: Or if there be ſome little difference in Opinion among you, don't ſeparate, and break aſunder, and rend the Communion of the Church of Chriſt; yet ſtill *be like minded one towards another, i. e.* come with equal degrees of Charity and Love one towards another, and hope the beſt one of another: for that the ſenſe no doubt is, that by *like-mindedneſs* is meant agreeing in the ſame Truths, τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, to think the very ſame thing. So that the plain meaning no doubt is this; God grant, ſaith the Apoſtle, that your Heats and Differences being laid aſide, whether about the Obſervation of Meats, or Days, or the like, that you may think and agree mutually in the ſame thing, and that *according to Chriſt Jeſus*: This is added, to reſtrain them from agreeing in any falſe or erroneous Opinions; but wiſhes their ſenſe of Religion to be agreeable to Chriſt, the Author of all Truth.

That you may with one mind and one mouth glorifie God: That when you come to pray to, or praiſe God, you may not onely do it in the ſame Form and ſound of Words, but alſo with all

your Minds full of mutual Affection one towards another, without any ſurly demeanour, contempt, hatred, or cenſuring of each other, that you may do it ſo unanimouſly, as if there were but one Mind and one Mouth among you. He would have the Weak and the Strong lay aſide their Differences, and joyn in the Fundamentals, to *glorifie God* together.

Wherefore, ſaith he, *receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received us, to the glory of God: i. e.* Look upon each other as Brethren; in all humility of kindneſs and condeſcenſion, embrace and ſuccour one another: In ſtead of deſpiſing and driving Men from your Communion, help up them that are fallen, let one endeavour to bring the other to himſelf, the Strong reduce the Weak, the Learned the Ignorant, and the believing Gentile, the prejudiced Jew: and let him cheriſh, and inſtruct, and be tender of him, with a Brotherly Care and Affection.

Even as Chriſt alſo received us, to the glory of God. Chriſt did much more than all this for us, that he adviſeth us to do one for another. Chriſt did not diſdain us, that are more unworthy of his Preſence, than we are of each others. So our *Saviour* ſaith by *St. John*, ch. 17. v. 24. *Father*,

ther, I will that thoſe whom thou haſt given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou haſt given me. So that Chriſt received us into the Fellowſhip and Partnerſhip of the Glory of God, and therefore we ought to receive one another.

So that the whole meaning of the Text is, The Apoſtle beſeeches God to grant them the ſame Sentiments and Underſtanding of the true Religion of Chriſt; or if they have not juſt the very ſame Sentiments of things in every Particular, (as it may be few Men have) yet that they would not rend and tear Chriſt's Church, but would lay aſide their diſlikes of each others private Opinion, and with one Heart and one Mouth joyn together in Publick Duties and Ordinances, and receive one another in the viſible Communion of the Chriſtian Church: that the Weak ſhould not as Malecontents go to ſeparate themſelves, and throw away their Souls; nor the Strong (as having a clearer Underſtanding) diſdain to joyn with the Weak; but that we ſhould *receive one another*, to the helping each other forward in Grace, as Chriſt alſo offers to receive us to the Eternal Being with him in Glory. And now having ſpoke diſtinctly to the Words of the

Text, I ſhall paſs to the ſecond thing, which I ſhall inſiſt on very briefly. And that is,

2. To conſider that great Duty of Obedience to Magiſtrates. And this I ſhould not have mentioned now, but onely that *St. Paul* lays it down as the firſt ſtep to Peace and Order in the Chriſtian Church; and likewiſe becauſe the Diſpute of Days and Meats, *&c.* is out of doors between us and our Brethren the Diſſenters, and becauſe they ſeem as much blunder'd and puzled about the extent of Obedience to our Laws, as the Jews were of theirs; which is the reaſon why I touch upon this *Duty* as I go. And indeed their being ſo much miſtaken in the extent of Chriſtian Obedience, is that (I fear) which makes them take ſo little notice of the Laws of a Reformed Chriſtian Prince: for if the Power of a Heathen Prince be from God, and that *he that reſiſts* him, *ſhall receive damnation to himſelf*; much more, when *one* (as I may ſay) *after God's own heart* is in the Throne, when he countenances that ſame Religion which we pretend to love at our very Hearts, and which our Forefathers ſealed with their Blood.

Theſe Conſiderations (methinks) might make us run Voluntiers in Obedience to him, and cauſe

cauſe us to ſtifle all the *little Tricks and Humours* of our own, when God and the King go thus together in our *Iſrael*. Nay, beſides all this, our Laws are not the Breath of one ſingle Perſon only, but proceed from the mature Deliberation of Men of our own chuſing, to repreſent our Grievances, and take care that no heavier Burdens be laid on our Bodies, or Minds, than themſelves, as Fellow-ſubjects, are ready to bear. And yet ſtrange it is, that after all theſe wonderful Priviledges, we ſhould have ſome repining at, and others defying our admirable Form and Methods of Government; that they ſhould allow none to be Lords over them; and that the Pretence of Chriſtian Liberty, ſhould fight and ſet it ſelf againſt the Laws of God and Man: and this we ſee by too ſad and daily experience it doth. Whereas were our Prince in his Judgment a Heathen, in his Power furniſh'd to be arbitrarily and uncontrolably Cruel, and in his Will and Inclinations delighting to cruſh and grieve his Subjects; yet to this Power we muſt be obedient. In ſhort, be the Prince what he will, God requires a thorow Obedience one way or other; and therefore the thoughts of a Gracious, a Merciful, and a Reformed Prince, ſhould

ſhould make us ſo proud of, and pleas'd with our Governour, as not to thwart him upon Straws and Trifles. No Maſter, tho never ſo mean, but expects Dutifulneſs from his Servant: No Father, tho never ſo poor, but requires Obedience from his Child. And why ſhould a Prince (who is above us all) ſuffer himſelf to be mock'd, when no body elſe will? Why ſhould he be called a Law-maker of his Country, if every humourous fanciful Perſon may control his Authority when he pleaſeth? This ſeems a great Affront to the Supreme Power on Earth, eſpecially a Power ſo great as to be *ordained of God*: Tho I really fear many Chriſtians do not know what they do, when, to the indulging ſome Humours of their own, they bid Adieu to all Authority, and do what in ſingle Perſons lies to the dividing Chriſtians, and confounding Church-Order and Diſcipline. But I hope better of you, my Brethren; and therefore I ſhall not inſiſt any more upon this Head, only adding that of the Apoſtle, That *you muſt be ſubject, not only for wrath, but conſcience ſake, i. e.* You muſt make Obedience to Governors as ſincerely your Deſire and Endeavour, as any other Goſpel-duty whatſoever. But I deſign'd only

to touch upon this Head; and therefore ſhall paſs to the next Head; and that is,

3. How Chriſtians ſhould carry themſelves towards each other with reference to Communion, *viz.* the Strong to the Weak, and the Weak to the Strong, that ſo we may be *like minded one towards another.*

The Strong are thoſe that have an exact Knowledge of Things both Lawful and Unlawful, and which think nothing that is Lawful to be Unlawful.

The Weak are thoſe that think one or more Things that are Lawful, to be Unlawful: and their Weakneſs conſiſts in their doubting and miſtaking Judgments about Things that are Lawful.

The Strong in the Apoſtles days were thoſe that thorowly underſtood what Liberty they had by Chriſt from the Jewiſh Ceremonies.

The Weak in thoſe days were thoſe that thought well of Chriſtianity, and yet for all that were unwilling quite to throw off the Ceremonial Law, that ſtood upon *Meats and Days, &c.* tho the Goſpel acquitted them.

The Strong in our days are thoſe that are heartily obedient to all the Laws of Magiſtrates, that

that are not forbidden in Gods Word; and that are ſatisfied that a Prince hath Power to enjoyn any thing in our Worſhip, that is not excepted againſt in the Goſpel.

The Weak in our days are thoſe that either can't or won't diſtinguiſh between Articles of Faith, and Modes of Worſhip; that think they are not obliged, nay, that they ought not to obey their Governours, as to the enjoyning Indifferent Things in their Worſhip, becauſe they are not commanded in Words at length in the *New Teſtament.*

And now having named to you the Men and the Thing, I ſhall proceed humbly to offer ſome Rules to your Conſideration, and ſo conclude.

And in theſe I ſhall apply my ſelf to the Strong and the Weak; and becauſe St. *Paul* in this Chapter begins with the Strong, I ſhall do ſo too. *We therefore that are ſtrong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak*, eſpecially if the Weak are as they were in thoſe days, (and perhaps had ſome reaſon to be) in a great ſtrait which to take; for it was doubtleſs very hard for Men then, eſpecially thoſe that were Zealous, to throw off a Religion almoſt wholly, and run with immediate ſatisfaction into another. It

was doubtleſs a great Surpriſe to them, that after a Religion had flouriſh'd about Four thouſand years, and had been owned by God as the True in all Ages before: I ſay, 'twould make any Man at a ſtand, to ſee one Perſon come and tell us of a ſudden, That *neither Circumciſion nor Uncircumciſion availed any thing*; that *Meats and Days were all alike*; and that *the Old allowed and eſtabliſhed Law, muſt give way to a New Goſpel.* I queſtion, if any of us had lived in thoſe days, aud been bred up in the ſtricteſt Knowledge of the Law, how many of us would inſtantly have turned Chriſtians; eſpecially ſince ſo many of us now ſtumble, and are miſtaken about the Goſpel, tho the World hath been ſo long inur'd and accuſtomed to its Doctrine: ſo that there was great reaſon in thoſe days for the Strong to bear with the Weak, becauſe the Difficulties of rightly judging and diſcerning Things were very ſtrong and maſculine, enough to throw down weak Minds. But when *Weakneſs* is pretended, to make way for *Confuſion*; when Men will pretend they are *weak at one time*, and will take it amiſs when you go to inſtruct them *as ſuch at another*; this looks rather like *Wilfulneſs*, than the *Weakneſs* St. *Paul* here means.

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But I am very well aware, that there is a very popular and current Obſervation in our days, which ſeems a great Objection againſt what I have hitherto ſaid; and that is, *That Men can no more be ſuppoſed to be alike in Judgment, than they are in Features.* But the Caſe is not at all the ſame. Men would, no doubt, be all exactly Featur'd alike, if God had deſign'd they ſhould be ſo, and had drawn them all as Copies from the ſame Original: But he hath given us all the very ſelf-ſame Law and Rule; he hath given us the ſame Faculties to judge with; and therefore it might juſtly be expected we ſhould all think the ſame things. One Soul hath no unlikeneſs to another, but onely from the different Humours and Sentiments it receives: And if the Rules be all the ſame to manage our Souls by, whence comes the Unlikeneſs? Not from the neceſſary impreſt Features of the Soul, but from the wrong Apprehenſion and Management of the Rule. So that 'tis no fault not to be alike in outward Features, becauſe God never deſigned us all the ſelf-ſame external Aſpect: But 'tis a Crime not to *think the ſelf-ſame truth, according to Chriſt Jeſus*; becauſe this was the Reaſon of Gods giving us one unalterable Rule, *that we*

ſhould

should with one mind and one heart glorifie him. But I must pass to the several Considerations, some to the Strong, and some to the Weak, and so conclude.

1. To the Strong, I desire them to consider these following Things, with reference to the Weak. By the Weak I mean those that are really so, and not such as use it for an obstinate and ungovernable Pretence.

1. I desire the Strong to consider, That their weak Brethren seem to have somewhat to say for themselves. When I hear a Man telling me that he hath been educated in such an Opinion, and his Parents before him, nay, and that he doth not owe his Opinion onely to the Font, but that he hath strove, and prayed, and read, and considered, and conferr'd; that after all his Examination, he cannot find that he hath any love for any Opinion, more than his unconquerable Perswasion fixes him: I say, when we hear a Man sincerely, and from the bottom of his Heart, saying, That he cannot distinguish things as others can; that he cannot think that Indifferent which others do; that he cannot admit things that are really Lawful in others Opinion, to appear so in his: A Man that is Strong ought to

to pity such a ones Weakness: Tho, to my apprehension, 'tis very strange, if what these Men tell us, be true; 'tis very odd, that a Man out of the Church shall tell us, by his Eye-sight, that a House is a House, a Tree a Tree, and a Man a Man, and see these things as clearly as any Man else; and yet have this Man into a Church, and you can't perswade him, but that a plain whited Wall is a Carved or a Molten Image: For this is really the Case; Take these Men in Worldly Business, and they are as intelligent and as strong and as rational as others: but in Religion they are as odd and aukerd and untractable: Tho, methinks, 'tis very sad, that that Religion which Christ designed to enlighten, should cloud and maze their Understandings: But yet thus we oft see it is, Men are thus either in pretence or reality weak; however that be, we must leave them to God, bear with their Weakness, and be glad to see them in our Communion. And if I can any thing judge of the Temper of those that are of the Church of *England*, I dare vouch for the wiser and soberer part of them, that they do not disdain Communion with the weakest Brother. But alas! the Case is now altered from that in *St. Paul's* days; the VVeak refuse

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Communion with the Strong, which ſeems to give a great contradiction to their pretended Weakneſs; for thoſe that really know themſelves weak, would not throw themſelves out to the wide World, and pretend to take greater care for themſelves, than God in his Providence, and their Governours by their great Care offer to them. But,

2. The Strong ought to bear with and pity the Weak, in that they expoſe their Perſons and Fortunes to the Cenſure of the Magiſtrate, upon *Needleſs things*. Real Martyrdom, and laying down our Lives and Eſtates for the Truth, is highly commendable in the Eyes of God and Man: But to withſtand and contend with the Supreme Magiſtrate, when he is doing the true part of his Duty, is really a very great Evil; for a good Magiſtrate is the great Crown and Bleſſing of a Nation; for by prudent Exerciſe of good and righteous Laws, he reduces many to a good and right Underſtanding of Things, that it may be would not elſe mind or conſider about Religion: And if the Magiſtrate doth not take care of his Subjects Souls, as well as their Bodies, he bears the beſt part of his Sword in vain; for People are very apt to run into ſtrange

strange Enthusiasm, when every Man may chuse on what Religion he pleases; and we may well think a Prince blameworthy in this Particular, if God own him as his Deputy and Vicegerent, and yet he doth nothing for God in all his Government. And indeed we have all the reason in the World to give all due respect to the Laws (especially) of Good Princes; for the higher the Office, the greater the Grace that descends upon them. But yet notwithstanding the Prince, as a part of his Duty, takes care to see Religion exercis'd; yet too many there are that dare to offend, and expose their Lives and Fortunes to the dint of his Laws, and that for little, petty, trivial things: And these the Strong ought to pity; they seem to be in earnest, when their Blindness will enable them to part with that which is dear to them, rather than obey. Therefore when we see any of our weak Brethren in trouble because of their Weakness, let us not deride and condemn them because of their Weakness, but pity them, that they do not see the Mercies of God, in so good a Prince, and such good Laws. Let us not, I say, despise them; for, as the Apostle argues, *Who made thee to differ?* Was it not the Grace of God that rescued thee from this Weakness?

ness? And indeed the Sufferings even of a notorious Malefactor are pitiable, as we have a general Respect for Humane Nature. And this will induce our weak Brother to think that we are loving, and tender, and Christian-like, when we do not mock at, but pity their Calamity. Tho 'tis very fit and meet that good and righteous Laws should take place, and be executed upon Offenders; yet 'twould be hard, if those that are to execute these Laws, or any other, should superadd any Censure, or intermingle any sort of Treatment, that the Laws will not directly allow or do not expresly enjoyn. 'Tis no Persecution to put good and justifiable Laws in Execution; but it looks like one, when those that are to do it, rejoyce in their Brothers Sufferings. But,

3. The Strong should consider and pity the Meanness and Confusion of their Faith and Understanding. Now *Faith*, as the Scripture saith, *comes by hearing*; and therefore this Fault I shall rather chuse to lay upon their Teachers, than upon them; tho 'tis in part their fault, to make no better a Choice. And I must confess, I take it to be the particular sleight of their Preachers to cut out Work for themselves, to make their

Hearers of nice and bogling Conſciences, that they may have them under their Dominion, to raiſe ſuch Scruples that they and none elſe care to anſwer, and render Religion an odd and unintelligible Undertaking. I muſt confeſs, I have not much heard their Sermons; but I have perus'd ſome of their Books, where a great deal of what they ſay is very formidable, and ſome again unintelligible Doctrine; where *Nineteen* Marks of Grace are ſet down, and ſtrictly required, when *Two*, or it may be *never a one of them*, will ſerve the turn. Now, for my part, I heartily pity any Hearer, that with Awe and Reverence puts his Soul into the Hands of a Teacher that is not Faithful, that drags him thorow a rough and tempeſtuous Way, when a much plainer and eaſier is nigh at hand. Chriſt came to make Religion plain and eaſie; and if any Man that puzzles and entangles it, be his true Embaſſadour, judge ye. But having ſome Conſiderations to add to the other ſort of Men, the Weaker Brethren, I ſhall paſs to them, and ſpeak but briefly to them, and ſo conclude. And to theſe my Requeſt is,

1. To have a competent and becoming Reverence for Authority. And here I do not go

perſwade theſe Men into the Notion of *Infallibility*, as if all their Governours did or ſaid were as infallible as any part of the *New Teſtament*; but to deſire them to have in themſelves ductile, obedient, governable, and perſwaſive Frames of Spirit; not to be morose, or peeviſh, or ſowr, or obſtinate: And let the Conſideration of his being *the Power and the Ordinance of God*, carry them beyond all their little Doubtings and Objections. *A meek, and a quiet, and a ſubmiſſive Frame of Spirit, is in the ſight of God of great price.*

2. My Deſire to the Weak of our days is, ſeriouſly to conſider, That the Government can never provide againſt all the petty Exceptions of every particular Perſon; and that 'tis impoſſible that all the *Diſſenters* can be pleas'd. Is not this to be prov'd within our Memory, when the *Presbyterian* and *Independent* (tho now they love ſo dearly) were as much Antichriſtian one to another, as now *We* are to Both? And if at this time the Government goes to comply with the Conſcience of the *Presbyterian*, what then will become of the *Independent*? If the Mouths of both theſe can be ſtopp'd, what muſt be done for the *Anabaptiſt*? Or if theſe could be complied

complied with too, what shall we do for the great Numbers of *Dissenting Quakers?* All these come in with a pretended equal Cry and Loudness of Conscience; and if these *Dividers* cannot condescend to each others Weakness, how can they expect the Government should? Therefore when they desire that the Governours should make such Laws as shall suit every Mans Conscience, that's impracticable, nay, and impossible, without bringing absolute Confusion into the Church and State: Nay, themselves, I dare say, do not desire the Laws should be made so loose, as to take in all the several *Sects* of *Dissenters*; and if it takes in one Party that is blinded and weakned by his Conscience, why not another? If they object, *That a little Condescension would take in some:* I beseech them, On whose side ought the Condescension to lie? Is it not more feasible that particular Persons may come into the Church, than that the whole Form of Church and State-Government must be new-molded for them? If this be an humble or modest Demand, I leave every Man (that can) to judge; and I think we may safely undertake that the Government will grant, when all the *Dissenters* are agreed what to ask, I mean,

that

that will make us *all one*, *according to Christ Jesus.*

3. My Desire to the weak Brethren is, not to place Religion, or the Suspension of it, in little trifling Indifferent Things. This was that our Saviour highly blamed in the *Pharisees*: Nay, is it not the extreme Dotage of some in our days, that think a Tag more the Gospel-mode than a Ribband, or a short Black Coat more Edifying and Evangelical, than a Gown or a Surplice? This is that which we really and truly call *Superstition* in the Church of *Rome*, that a Stick set on cross should be more Reverend and Venerable, than in any other Posture. The Substance and Truth of Religion lies in great and weighty Matters; and these (thanks be to God) our *Dissenters* own we retain in the Doctrine of the Church of *England*: And therefore why do they fly us by reason of our Ceremonies? All that we say for them, is, That they are *Ancient*, and *Decent*; and who fitter to judge of *Order* and *Decency*, than our Governours? If they object, *Had these things been used in our Saviours time, they had not scrupled them*: But how are we assured that they speak truth in this Matter? The *Sacraments* were used in our Saviours time, and

and yet a great number of our *Diſſenters* ſcruple them: The *Creed* was compiled in the Apoſtles time, and yet moſt of them boggle at ſome part of it, *viz. The Communion of Saints*, and the trueſt and moſt intelligible Notion of *the Holy Catholick Church.* Beſides, Chriſt and his Apoſtles had then neither Room, nor External Authority to plant and perfectly ſettle a Viſible Church; they could inſtil their Doctrines, and General Rules of Faith, but could not deſcend to all the Particular Modes of Worſhip: theſe we derive as faithfully as we can from the Primitive Chriſtians, which all ſober and wiſe Men have a great Veneration for. And indeed the Apoſtle hath given fair Power and Encouragement to Magiſtrates to be doing, when he bids them take care that *all things be done decently and in order.* And who is the beſt Judge of *Order* and *Decency*, the Magiſtrate (*the Ordinance of God*) or the Weak Brother, I ſhall leave to Wiſe Men to determine. And whereas they oft object, *That the Government muſt not enjoyn any thing but what is expreſly commanded in the Scriptures:* If they will turn the ſame Argument fairly, it will amount to thus much directly againſt themſelves, *viz.* That they muſt not deny

deny Obedience in any thing that is not positively and in plain Words forbidden; unless they think the Scripture allows them more Liberty than it allows the Magistrate, or that they shall have Liberty to disobey in those very Cases, in which the Prince shall not have Power to enjoyn: And then let them shew us where the Scriptures deny a Surplice, or any other of our Ceremonies retained and used. And do they deny Compliance because of the Tenderness of their Conscience? The Magistrate doth likewise, out of his tender Love and Care for the Church, and Uniformity in our Worship, enjoyn them; as well knowing, that some External Form of Church-Government is absolutely needful; and none yet, after several Trials, can be pitch'd upon, that are more decent, and less offensive.

4. My last Desire to weak Brethren is, that they would not throw themselves out of the Communion of Christs Catholick Church. By this they frustrate the Design of Christs coming into the World, and Dying for us. He came to make us all one: And, I perceive, they take it mightily in dudgeon to be Excommunicated; which (as they manage the Case) is onely a Publick Confirmation of what they themselves have done long before.

before. *St. Paul* doth not ſeem to imagine, that they would throw themſelves out of Communion; but was afraid that the Strong would not Communicate with them: And this we deſire with all our Souls to do; but, the miſchief of it is, our weaker Brethren think themſelves Holier and Wiſer, and, if ſo, much Stronger than we. And to theſe I may well uſe thoſe Words of the Wiſe-man, onely adviſable in ſuch Caſes as theſe, *Eccleſ.* 7. 16. *Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thy ſelf over wiſe; for why ſhouldeſt thou deſtroy thy ſelf?* And why ſhould theſe Men, under a needleſs and unjuſtifiable Pretence of Sanctity, hazard their *Souls*, by rending the Communion of Chriſts Church, and by Diſobedience to Gods Governours? and their Bodies and Eſtates, by undergoing the Penalty of our National Laws? *Who hath required this at their Hands*, that they ſhould ſet up for Martyrs, before they are called to bear witneſs to the Truth of Chriſt? And I wiſh to God theſe Men would ſeriouſly conſider, what 'tis to be out of the Communion of the Catholick Church. If there be but One Church, why do they not Communicate with us? why do they go out from us? If there be Two Catholick Churches,

what becomes of an entire Article of our *Creed?* Indeed there is no ſenſe in that Aſſertion. But I muſt not, I need not add any more to theſe Particulars. I hope what I have ſaid, will not be look'd upon either as ſharp, uncharitable, or unſeaſonable: What I have ſaid, is ſpoke out of a real deſire that you would be *like minded one towards another*, that you would *receive one another, as Chriſt alſo received us, to the Glory of God.* I am well aware, that Men are not like Iron, to be hammer'd when they are heated, or to be hector'd and jeer'd into Communion and Religion; and therefore I have been all along pleading for the contrary: But I hope no Man will be angry, when we modeſtly and ſincerely tell him the Truth, as I have endeavoured plainly to do: Eſpecially, I would not leave any Diſtaſte with you, as to my Perſon or Temper, now in this laſt Exerciſe I am performing among you; for this would be ill Policy with reſpect to my Future Undertakings, and an ill Requital to that Kindneſs I own I have received from all Parties among you. I ſhall onely beg your Prayers and Well-wiſhes for my Future Undertakings, and Succeſs in my Performances, and conclude all with thoſe Words of the Apoſtle, *2 Cor.* 13. 11, 14.

11, 14. *Finally, Brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with, bless, preserve, and guide you, from this time forth for evermore.* Amen.

FINIS.

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